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## 5. AESTHETICS

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This EIR chapter describes the existing visual environment within and surrounding the Downtown Improvement Program boundary, and identifies the potential impacts of anticipated project activities and associated growth and intensification on these conditions.

### 5.1 SETTING

#### 5.1.1 General Visual Character of the Project Area

The visual environment of downtown Sunnyvale is composed of a mix of old and new commercial and residential development surrounded by older residential neighborhoods. Some of the original surrounding residential neighborhoods have retained their single-family character. Other original single-family residential edges have been sporadically redeveloped with multi-family housing or commercial uses. In addition, introduction of the Town Center Mall complex in the late 1970's obscured the original underlying downtown grid pattern. The Town Center Mall is located in the geographic center of the project area, and is also the project area's largest single structure. The visual landscape of the downtown can currently be characterized as mixed or disorganized, in that no coherent concept of land use, architecture, streetscape treatment, or signage is apparent. The overall scale of most of the downtown blocks and street system appears to be oriented primarily to the automobile, and does not create a pedestrian-friendly environment.<sup>1</sup>

The 1993 Sunnyvale Downtown Specific Plan and the current (August 2002) *Downtown Design Plan* recommendations recognize seven major land use districts in the downtown, with characteristic land use patterns and visual environments in each. Existing visual characteristics within and surrounding the project area are described below. The description has been derived primarily from the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan, the 1999 Sunnyvale Town Center Mall Modifications Project EIR, and the August 2002 *Downtown Design Plan* narrative, and focuses on key project area visual "gateways," visual characteristics and special features that distinguish each designated district, project area visual "edges," and important project area view corridors.

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from the City-certified Final Program Environmental Impact Report, Sunnyvale Downtown Development Program (City of Sunnyvale, June 25, 1990); Draft EIR, pages 4-87 through 4-88.

### **5.1.2 Project Area Visual Gateways**

Existing visual "gateways" into and within the project area are identified in the City-adopted 1993 Specific Plan. The 1993 Specific Plan defines these visual gateways as "a point of entry into a district or part of the community..."<sup>1</sup> The Specific Plan identifies two primary gateways into the project area along Mathilda Avenue--one southbound gateway at the northern end of Mathilda at Washington Avenue (the base of the Mathilda Avenue bridge/railroad overcrossing), and one northbound gateway at the southern end of Mathilda at El Camino Real.

### **5.1.3 Project Area View Corridors**

As outlined in subsection 5.1.1 above, the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan states that the primary view corridors which affect the visual image of the downtown are the Mathilda Avenue Corridor and the El Camino Real corridor. These two routes are both high traffic volume carriers which lead residents of Sunnyvale and visitors into and through the downtown.<sup>2</sup> The Mathilda Avenue visual corridor is currently characterized by a strip commercial appearance that is described in the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan and proposed August 2002 *Downtown Design Plan* as detracting from the described visual character and identity of the downtown. Similarly, the El Camino Real visual corridor is currently characterized by a low-rise, auto-oriented, commercial streetscape with streetfront parking, an inconsistent pattern of median landscaping and street trees, and a wide variety of land uses, lot sizes, setbacks, building facades, building heights and frontage treatments. Minor view corridors identified in the 1993 Specific Plan include Sunnyvale Avenue (from the railroad tracks to El Camino Real), Olive Avenue, Iowa Avenue, and the Washington Avenue retail corridor.

### **5.1.4 District-Specific Visual Characteristics and Features**

(a) Town Center Mall District. The existing Town Center Mall district (subdistrict 18 on Figure 3.4) is comprised of the largest single structure in downtown Sunnyvale. The existing approximately 50-foot-high mall building (approximately equivalent to four stories) adjoins a two-level parking garage to the west and a sparsely landscaped parking lot to the east. The two-level parking structure stretches between West Washington and Iowa Avenues, separated from the shopping mall structure by narrow Town Center Lane.

The reinforced concrete mall building and adjoining parking garage are much larger in scale than other structures in the downtown area. Portions of the mall building and/or parking garage are highly visible from nearby streets--from Mathilda Avenue, Sunnyvale Avenue, and in particular, from the street frontages along Washington Avenue, Iowa Avenue, and from

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<sup>1</sup>City of Sunnyvale, 1993. Sunnyvale Downtown Specific Plan, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>City of Sunnyvale, 1993. Sunnyvale Downtown Specific Plan.

associated intersecting streets (e.g., Murphy Avenue, Frances Street, Aries Way, McKinley Avenue, and Taaffe Street). The uniform facades and continuous roof design of the mall structure create long, high-mass frontages along Washington and Iowa Avenues. The collection of intervening "pad" buildings and surface parking areas along the Mathilda and Sunnyvale Avenue frontages appear monumental and outsized in contrast to the smaller-scale, more conventional pattern of predominantly one-and-two-story commercial and residential building types which exist on the opposite sides of these downtown streets. These disharmonious street relationships are softened by mature street landscaping, but nonetheless continue to detract from the original pedestrian orientation and historic identity of the Sunnyvale downtown.

(b) North of Washington District. The North of Washington district (subdistricts 1 and 1a on Figure 3.4) has a built environment characterized by new mid-rise commercial developments, including the recently completed Mozart Office Development (five-to-six-stories) and the one-to-two-story Town and Country Village Shopping Center complex. The Mozart office development is particularly distinctive visually; the visually prominent five- to six-story office buildings have created a new visual landmark and gateway element at the northwest corner of the project area. Evelyn Avenue Plaza is also located in this area, providing a visually distinctive urban open space element

(c) Murphy Avenue District. This district (subdistrict 2) includes the City-designated Murphy Station Landmark District, including the Sunnyvale train station area north of Evelyn Avenue. These visually distinctive areas represent the only parts of Sunnyvale's historic downtown that were not razed during the urban renewal activities of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Murphy Avenue District includes Sunnyvale's original Main Street. The original intimate scale and pedestrian character of the Murphy Avenue streetscape, including its many historic "Main Street" building facades, have been recognized and preserved through creation of the Murphy Station Landmark District. The Murphy Station Landmark District has protected status under the City's Heritage Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 19.80 of the Sunnyvale Municipal Code). Under the ordinance provisions, any alteration of buildings within the district must be visually consistent with the historic character of the building and district.

Murphy Avenue has recently been upgraded by the City with special paving, light fixtures, street furniture, and landscaping, consistent with a set of City-adopted Murphy Avenue Design Guidelines. The avenue contains a variety of visually interesting specialty shops, commercial services uses, entertainment uses, and restaurants. Lots are narrow and shops front directly onto the sidewalk. Most buildings are low rise, one- to two-story shops, and many have awnings. Street trees along the avenue are mature and the streetscape is embellished with street furniture and plantings.

The Sunnyvale CalTrain station is located north of Hendy Avenue. The station was recently converted into a "multi-modal" facility (2000). A parking garage, pedestrian bridge, and

stairway elevator and clock tower were constructed on the train station property as part of the multi-modal project.

(d) Sunnyvale/Carroll District. This district (subdistricts 3, 4 and 5), located north of Washington Avenue and east of Sunnyvale Avenue, is comprised of low-density residential and commercial uses, including some newer high- and medium-density multi-family housing developments located north of Evelyn Avenue. The low density residential portions of the district (in subdistricts 4 and 5) consist of one- to two-story single and multi-family housing units predominantly in ranch and Spanish revival styles dating from the 1950s onward. In addition, high density residential areas in portions of this district north of Evelyn Avenue are composed of newer structures ranging from two to four stories. Street trees are varied and inconsistent throughout the district.

(e) East of Sunnyvale District. The East of Sunnyvale Avenue district (subdistricts 6, 7 and 8) south of Washington Avenue is comprised of a mix of service and retail uses mixed with low- and medium-density residential uses. Subdistricts 6 and 8 are primarily residential in character and similar in appearance to the Sunnyvale/Carroll District, as described above. Subdistrict 7 is largely comprised of office buildings, as well as a parking structure that serves the Town Center Mall and adjacent offices.

(f) South of Iowa District. This district (subdistricts 9, 10, 11 and 12) includes low density single-family residential frontages along Olive Avenue opposite the Taaffe/Frances Heritage Housing District, as well as commercial and office uses along other major roadway corridors. As described in the Land Use chapter (in sections 4.2 and 4.3) of this EIR, this district provides an important visual buffer and transition role between the high-mass Town Center Mall District to the north and the visually sensitive, single-family, Taaffe/Frances Heritage Housing District to the south.

(g) Mathilda Avenue District. This district (subdistricts 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18a) fronts on either side of Mathilda Avenue, Sunnyvale's main, central thoroughfare connecting U.S. 101 and I-280. The street is currently a strip commercial thoroughfare with a visual character that has been described in both the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan and August 2002 *Downtown Design Plan* as detracting from the desired visual identity of the downtown. Existing building types along the corridor include a mixture of single-family detached houses, multi-family residential buildings, office buildings, restaurant structures, banks, and parking lots. Building heights range from one to four stories. Lot sizes range from approximately 0.15 acres to 1.8 acres. Building setbacks range from 0 to 25 feet.

Along the west side of Mathilda Avenue, the existing visual character of development is characterized by an inconsistent mix of vacant lots and buildings and small business strip commercial uses with street front parking, interspersed with older single-family and duplex residences. The east side of Mathilda is comprised of larger office buildings and commercial uses.

The mix of commercial uses along Mathilda tends to be auto-oriented, and includes a Denny's Restaurant and a mix of financial and real estate operations including Bank of the West, Washington Mutual, Bank of America, and Coldwell Banker. A landscaped median along the route has been planted with a consistent row deciduous trees. Sidewalk street trees on either side of the route are inconsistent.

(h) South of Olive Avenue Subarea. This area, which includes new subdistrict 20 as well as the southern portion of the Downtown Redevelopment Area between Olive Avenue and El Camino Real, includes Mathilda Avenue and El Camino Real frontages. These frontages are lined with a wide variety of land uses, lot sizes, setbacks, building facades, building heights, and frontage treatments. The El Camino Real frontage includes low-rise, auto-oriented commercial uses with streetfront parking. El Camino Real here is a six-lane state highway with a strip commercial visual character. El Camino Real has an inconsistent pattern of median landscaping and street trees.

#### **5.1.5 Edges**

Existing visual characteristics along the "edges" surrounding the project area are described below:

*To the North:* Large-lot, low-rise industrial uses are located in the adjacent area north of the project area, west of Mathilda Avenue. Low- and medium-density residential uses are located immediately north of the CalTrain tracks between Mathilda Avenue and Sunnyvale Avenue. The area north northeast of Sunnyvale Avenue is characterized by low-rise, large-lot industrial uses with surface parking.

*To the West:* The adjacent area west of the project area (west of Charles Street) is mainly comprised of single family, low- to medium-density single family residential uses. The Sunnyvale Civic Center is also located immediately west of the southwest corner of the project area, comprised of a 70s era campus of low-rise (one-story) buildings with associated surface parking, landscaping and outdoor areas.

*To the East:* Areas immediately east of the project area are mainly comprised of low-density single-family houses. One newer multi-family, medium-density residential complex is located between Lincoln Avenue and Hendy Avenue.

*To the South:* Immediately south of the project area, on the southern side of El Camino Real, is the recently constructed Olson Cherry Orchard mixed-use project, which includes 71,600 square feet of retail uses at the corner of El Camino Real and Mathilda Avenue, as well as 300 residential units in a four-story, multi-family residential complex. The remainder of the area south of El Camino Real is comprised of low-rise commercial and office uses with streetfront surface parking.

## 5.2 PERTINENT PLANS AND POLICIES

### 5.2.1 City of Sunnyvale General Plan

The City of Sunnyvale General Plan Land Use and Transportation Element (adopted 1997) contains the following policies and action statements pertinent to consideration of the potential visual effects of the proposed project:

- *Promote downtown as a unique place that is interesting and accessible to the whole City and the region. (Policy C1.2.1)*
- *Require new development to be compatible with the neighborhood, adjacent land uses, and the transportation system. (Policy N1.2, p. 171)*
- *Integrate new development and redevelopment into existing neighborhoods. (Action Statement N1.2.1, p. 171)*
- *Utilize adopted City design guidelines to achieve compatible architecture and scale for renovation and new development in Sunnyvale's neighborhoods. (Action Statement N1.2.2, p. 171)*
- *Promote an attractive and functional commercial environment. (Policy N1.13, p. 175)*
- *Permit more intense commercial and office development in the downtown, given its central location and accessibility to transit. (Policy N1.12)*
- *Discourage commercial uses and designs that result in a boxy appearance. (Action Statement N1.13.1, p. 175)*
- *Encourage the maintenance and revitalization of shopping centers. (Action Statement N1.13.4, p. 175)*

The General Plan *Community Development Element, Community Design Sub-Element* (adopted 1990) contains the following additional extensive list of policies and action statements pertinent to consideration of the project's potential visual effects:

- *Ensure that new development is compatible with the character of special districts and residential neighborhoods. (Policy A.2, p. 95)*
- *Continue to encourage infill development or redevelopment which is compatible with the use, density, setbacks, height and, where possible, the predominant building style and size of the surrounding district or neighborhood. (Action Statement A.2c, p. 95)*

- *Support measures which enhance the identity of special districts and residential neighborhoods to create more variety in the physical environment. (Policy A.3, p. 95)*
- *Strengthen the downtown as the visual as well as functional focus of Sunnyvale. (Action Statement A.3f, p. 96)*
- *Consider design features that help locate the downtown district and emphasize the roadways and intersections leading downtown. (Action Statement A.3g, p. 96)*
- *Encourage distinctive projects at major nodes which have a coherent spatial relationship and create dynamic spaces at these intersections. (Action Statement A.3h, p. 96)*
- *Maintain and provide professionally designed medians with an interesting and attractive variety of ornamental, deciduous and evergreen trees and plants which are predominantly water-wise and drought resistant. (Action Statement 2.5B.1b)*
- *Place a priority on quality architecture and site design which will enhance the image of Sunnyvale and create a vital and attractive environment for businesses, residents, and visitors, and be reasonably balanced with the need for economic development to assure Sunnyvale's economic prosperity. (Policy C.1, p. 98)*
- *Continue to insure that projects have amenities which make them attractive and that these features are not sacrificed to maximize development potential. (Action Statement C.1c, p. 99)*
- *Review site plans to insure the design is compatible with the natural and surrounding built environment. (Policy C.2, p. 99)*
- *Encourage site design which preserves scenic vistas and maximizes solar orientation for heating and cooling. (Action Statement C.2a, p. 99)*
- *Continue to monitor and develop standards for the preservation of mature trees and landscaping, and encourage the preservation of landscaping to be considered early in the site design. (Action Statement C.2b, p. 99)*
- *Continue to require that sites be designed so that the building locations, driveways, parking, exterior mechanical equipment, auxiliary structures, and service access areas are attractive and compatible with adjoining properties and the public right-of-way. (Action Statement C.2c, p. 99)*
- *Continue to require that on-site lighting be energy-efficient, unobtrusive, and located to minimize off-site glare while providing adequate nighttime safety. (Action Statement C.2d, p. 99)*

- *Encourage site plans to be integrated with the adjoining road pattern, and at important junctions, provide view corridors into the project or other interesting features which will engage people. (Action Statement C.2e, p. 99)*
- *Consider prohibiting wing walls or other blank, high walls on buildings in order to create attractive transition zones between buildings. (Action Statement C.2j, p. 100)*
- *Continue to require the screening of exterior mechanical equipment. (Action Statement C.2k, p. 100)*
- *Ensure that site design creates places which are well-organized, attractive, efficient, and safe. (Policy C.3, p. 100)*
- *Encourage sites to have obvious and easy-to-locate entries. (Action Statement C.3a, p. 100)*
- *Encourage site plans to have a legible organization, including focal points and features which provide direction and clarity about the use of the site. (Action Statement C.3b, p. 100)*
- *Encourage integrated site plans which have clear boundaries, similar detailing for all the elements, and a complementary relationship with the buildings. (Action Statement C.3d, p. 100)*
- *Encourage outdoor areas for relaxation or eating which are protected from noise and traffic. (Action Statement C.3i, p. 100)*
- *Continue to require visible and attractive artworks for new private development at gateways and on large commercial and industrial properties. (Action Statement C.3k, p. 100)*
- *Continue to require site plans with good public visibility of entries, adequate nighttime lighting, safe on-site circulation systems, and quick, unobstructed access routes for fire and police services. (Action Statement C.3m, p. 101)*
- *Continue to require site plans to be easily navigated by people with handicaps, and for some projects consider innovative features in excess of minimum state standards for handicap access. (Action Statement C.3n, p. 101)*
- *Encourage quality architectural design which improves the City's identity, inspires creativity, and heightens individual as well as cultural identity. (Policy C.4, p. 101)*
- *Encourage easily identified and attractive building entrances which are oriented to the street. (Action Statement C.4a, p. 101)*



- *Consider eliminating floor area ratio restrictions on entrances which enhance the architecture of the building and cannot be converted to work space. (Action Statement C.4b, p. 101)*
- *Require roof elements to wrap around the building so that the element looks integrated and not just pasted on. (Action Statement C.4c, p. 101)*
- *Encourage clear glass windows at the pedestrian level for commercial buildings to provide visibility of the activities inside stores and restaurants and visibility of pedestrian activity outside. (Action Statement C.4d, p. 101)*
- *Continue to require mechanical equipment to be fully screened and integrated with the architecture of the building. (Action Statement C.4e, p. 101)*
- *Encourage building windows to have a shape and spacing consistent with the building style. (Action Statement C.4f, p. 101)*
- *Encourage buildings with two or more stories to have architectural elements which create a pedestrian scale on the ground level, such as variations in the textures and materials, differentiated piers and columns, recessed entries and windows, awnings, or offset planes. (Action Statement C.4i, p. 102)*
- *Avoid tall buildings which create a tunnel effect, and where necessary step the building back above the second level or stagger setbacks on the street. (Action Statement C.4j, p. 102)*
- *Encourage buildings to have interesting articulation on all sides through changes in the building plane and height and the addition of elements such as deeply recessed or bay windows, porticos, or dormers which create shadow and texture. (Action Statement C.4k, p. 102)*
- *Avoid blank walls on the ends of buildings facing the roadway, and provide detail and articulation on these elevations. (Action Statement C.4l, p. 102)*
- *Encourage the spacing and size of doors and windows to have a rhythm compatible with the architectural style. (Action Statement C.4m, p. 102)*
- *Encourage buildings where each of the building elements, such as windows, roofs, and walls, are in proportion with each other. (Action Statement C.4n, p. 102)*
- *Encourage high-quality, durable materials for buildings which create texture. (Action Statement C.4o, p. 102)*

- *Avoid piecemeal embellishment, frequent changes in materials, or materials that are incompatible with the building style. (Action Statement C.4p, p. 102)*
- *Encourage exterior building materials to wrap around corners and any change in materials only to be made in locations where there is a change in the building plane or where a change in materials is effectively used to identify the base of the building. (Action Statement C.4q, p. 102)*
- *Review building colors in the context of the scale of the building, and avoid strong colors which may be overwhelming at larger scale. (Action Statement C.4r, p. 102)*
- *Encourage buildings where all of the design elements, such as colors, materials, style, and ornamentation, are unified and create cohesive, attractive, and distinctive architecture. (Action Statement C.4s, p. 102)*
- *Ensure that buildings are appropriate to their context and designed to be compatible with surrounding properties and special districts. (Policy C.5, p. 103)*
- *Encourage new construction to be consistent with the horizontal or vertical building orientation or building shape of special districts or streetscapes. (Action Statement C.5a, p. 103)*
- *Encourage roof styles which are similar to surrounding buildings or unique districts. (Action Statement C.5b, p. 103)*
- *Avoid buildings which do not have a similar scale or height as surrounding properties, except at gateways or for landmark structures. (Action Statement C.5c, p. 103)*
- *Avoid building colors which are not compatible with adjoining properties or special districts. (Action Statement C.5e, p. 103)*
- *Encourage new construction to be designed so that it minimizes the impact on the privacy of adjoining residential properties. (Action Statement C.5f, p. 103)*
- *Avoid tall buildings which substantially shade adjoining residential properties. (Action Statement C.5g, p. 103)*
- *Continue to require additional setbacks for new construction when necessary to preserve the light, air, views, and privacy of adjoining residential properties. (Action Statement C.5h, p. 103)*

### **5.2.2 Sunnyvale Downtown Specific Plan**

The 1993 Sunnyvale Downtown Specific Plan contains the following goals and policies pertinent to consideration of the potential visual effects of the proposed project:

- *Place a priority on quality architecture and site design which will enhance the image of Sunnyvale, create a vital and attractive environment for businesses, residents, and visitors, and be reasonably balanced with the need for economic development to assure Sunnyvale's economic prosperity. (Policy P.UD-6, p. 6)*
- *Ensure that buildings and related site improvements for private development are well designed and compatible with surrounding properties and districts. (Goal G.UD-3, p. 6)*

The Specific Plan also contains design guidelines that address architectural details, including building roofs, window glazing, decorative features, and street facade treatment.

### **5.2.3 City of Sunnyvale City-Wide Design Guidelines**

The City of Sunnyvale's City-Wide Design Guidelines (adopted in 1992) address (1) site design (setting, site organization, and open space); (2) building design (setback, scale and character, architecture and design, accessory utility buildings, roof, material and color); (3) parking and circulation (general, parking structures); (4) landscaping (general, peripheral, internal, parking lot, fences and walls); and (5) service facilities (general, mechanical equipment, loading, lighting, and trash enclosures). These guidelines do not represent adopted City environmental policy, but nevertheless would be applicable in reviewing the design of, and in developing visual mitigation requirements for, future development facilitated by the proposed Downtown Improvement Program Update.

## **5.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **5.3.1 Significance Criteria**

As defined by Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*,<sup>1</sup> a project may be deemed in this EIR to have a significant environmental effect on visual quality if it or related urban growth and intensification will:

- (a) have a substantial, adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- (b) substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;

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<sup>1</sup>2002 CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, Items I(a) through (d)

- (c) substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- (d) create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. "Glare" is defined by the City of Sunnyvale as the reflection of harsh bright light sufficient to cause physical discomfort or loss in visual performance and visibility.

The project area is not traversed by or adjacent to a state scenic highway. (El Camino Real is a state highway, but not a designated state *scenic* highway.) Therefore, criterion (b) would not be applicable to this project.

### **5.3.2 Proposed Project Visual Improvement Goals and Actions**

The *Downtown Design Plan* component of the proposed Downtown Improvement Program Update includes the following overall recommendations pertaining to project area visual factors and aesthetic improvement:

- Improve the street character of boulevards, avenues and streets;
- Improve and build upon existing assets; and
- Create a sense of arrival and address.

To achieve these basic aesthetic goals, an extensive set of detailed new or revised Design Plan policies, standards, and guidelines, are proposed in the August 2002 *Downtown Design Plan* for implementation in the form of amendments to the Downtown Specific Plan, General Plan and Zoning Code (as described in sections 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8 of this EIR, respectively). The potential aesthetic impacts of these amendments and the associated year 2020 project area growth scenario are described below.

### **5.3.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

#### **Impact 5-1: Potential Adverse Visual Impacts of Mathilda Corridor**

**Intensification.** The project includes an increased emphasis on taller buildings along the Mathilda Avenue corridor. The proposed land use designation and development standard revisions for the eastern side of Mathilda would permit construction of buildings which are significantly taller and larger than existing development in the area (with the exception of the recent Mozart Office Building).

**(continued)**

**Impact 5-1 (continued):**

Mathilda is a primary downtown visual corridor with strong effects on the image of the downtown and the community. The taller buildings could dramatically change the look and image of the downtown, creating a more dense (and cohesive) visual character along this primary downtown and community gateway. The height, scale, and appearance of the up to 100-foot tall, five- to six-story maximum building height allowances proposed along the eastern side of Mathilda between Washington Avenue and El Camino Real (subdistricts 13, 18a, and 20) could be perceived as visually incompatible with existing lower intensity (one- to four-story) development in the adjacent areas (subdistricts 1a, 13a, and the South of Olive Avenue area). The August 2002 *Downtown Design Plan* recommends specific additional development standards and design guidelines to ensure the visual compatibility of the taller buildings. If the specific design details of future buildings and other development components on the eastern side of Mathilda (such as street landscaping, sidewalk paving, etc.) do not adequately incorporate these *Downtown Design Plan*-recommended standards and guidelines, and urban design guidelines set forth in the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan for tall buildings on Mathilda, the project could result in a ***significant adverse visual impact***.

**Mitigation 5-1:** Implement the following measures to mitigate the potential adverse visual impacts of the project related to the Mathilda Avenue District:

(1) Include in the proposed amendments to the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan pertinent design guidelines currently included in the Specific Plan for tall buildings in the North of Washington District (subdistrict 1), revised to also apply to tall buildings on Mathilda Avenue south of Washington Avenue (subdistricts 13, 18a and 20), including guidelines pertaining to "Roof Treatment," "Building Materials & Colors" and other architectural details (see below).

(2) During the City's design review process and other development review procedures for future individual development applications involving properties along the eastern side of Mathilda south of Washington (i.e., within subdistricts 13, 18a and 20), place particular emphasis on ensuring that the development design:

(a) is consistent with the following provisions and recommendations of the April 2002 *Downtown Design Plan*:

- the "Street Character" provisions on page 40,
- the "Urban Design Plan" Land Use provisions on pages 52 and 53,

**(continued)**

**Mitigation 5-1 (continued):**

- the "Building Setback/Build-to Requirements" on pages 56-57, and
- the "Design Guidelines" for the "Mathilda Avenue District" on pages 72-77; and

(b) includes features (e.g., common landscaping, street furniture, sidewalk and pavement treatments) that visually unify the development frontage on the eastern side of Mathilda with the western side of Mathilda;

Implementation of these measures through the City's existing design review process would reduce this impact to a ***less than significant level***.

The 1993 Downtown Specific Plan (pages 50 through 55) contains building design guidelines formulated specifically to address anticipated high mass, up-to-125-foot-high office development in the North of Washington District (Block 1--the Mozart site). With the current *Downtown Design Plan*-recommended continuation of similar high-mass office development (up to 100-feet high/five- to six stories) southward along the eastern side of Mathilda, many of the urban design concepts set forth in the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan for the North of Washington District (Block 1) could be modified in the amended Specific Plan to apply to subdistricts 13, 18a and 20. The following are example adaptations of 1993 Downtown Specific Plan guidelines for Block 1 to apply to subdistricts 13, 18a and 20:

Roof Treatment:

- *Roof forms shall follow similar lines and support building massing and height transition from Mathilda Avenue to adjacent areas. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 50)*
- *No exterior wall reflective glass shall be used for commercial buildings in this area. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*
- *Masonry materials with strong vertical articulation (as opposed to strip horizontal window treatment) shall be used to convey quality building materials and permanence typical of Class A landmark office buildings. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*
- *First floor horizontal building lines should be continuous from building to building (e.g., reveals, cornice treatments, or other horizontal treatments signifying the delineation between the first and second floor). (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*

- *Vertical organization of window widths shall be proportional from floor to floor and building to building in a well-organized geometric symmetry. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*
- *Building colors shall follow a coordinated palette without clashing in contrast and hue. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*

#### Building Materials and Colors:

- *Building colors should complement one another. Earth tones, greys, pink granite, and off-white colors should be the palette for building exteriors. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*
- *Glass used at building exteriors should be non-reflective and tinted only to the extent that is required for energy efficiency. Strip or ribbon glass window treatments should be avoided. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*
- *Multi-storied buildings should express strong vertical and horizontal lines, rather than a "layered cake" visual appearance. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 53)*

#### Other Architectural Details:

- *The pedestrian atmosphere should be enhanced to the greatest degree possible. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 54)*
- *Building entries and lobbies should be clear and attractive, using large areas of clear glass, rich masonry materials, and strong architectural detailing at the ground floor level. (Downtown Specific Plan, page 54)*

Project consistency with such guidelines would need to be confirmed through the City's design review process.

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**Beneficial Impacts on the General Visual Character of the Project Area.** With the exception of potential adverse Mathilda Avenue District visual impacts described above, public improvements, private property rehabilitation, development of vacant and underutilized parcels, and other activities associated with the Downtown Improvement Program would be expected to improve the general visual quality of the project area and foster an improved overall community image and identity. One of the goals of the proposed *Downtown Design plan* is to "create a framework to link current and future downtown projects into a vibrant, cohesive place."<sup>1</sup> To that end, the recommendations for land use changes, streetscape improvements, open space

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<sup>1</sup>Sunnyvale Downtown Design Plan, p. 9.

improvements, street extensions, and changes in development standards (i.e., building height, setbacks, etc.) contained in the August 2002 *Downtown Design Plan*, if effectively implemented, would improve the overall visual environment in the project area.

The *Downtown Design Plan* recommends specific methods for ensuring that visual transitions between more intense newer central area development and existing development are smooth (e.g., stepping down building heights and densities, etc.). In addition, the Redevelopment Plan amendments component of the project would serve as an implementation and financing tool for the proposed Update, with its own central area rehabilitation and visual improvement effects.

Such project-related improvement to the overall aesthetic environment in downtown Sunnyvale, if effectively implemented, would represent a **beneficial visual impact**.

**Mitigation:** No significant adverse impact is identified; no mitigation is required.

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**Impacts on Project Area Visual Gateways.** The anticipated project-facilitated growth scenario would have the following potential visual impacts on identified primary visual "gateways" into the project area:

- *North End of Mathilda at Washington Avenue.* This southbound gateway has already been significantly affected by the recently completed Mozart development, which replaced surface parking lots in subdistrict 1 with a five- to six-story high-mass office building edge along Mathilda Avenue, *"producing dramatic, positive changes in the visual character of the Mathilda Avenue and Washington Avenue streetscapes by adding visual interest and establishing a stronger 'downtown' image along these view corridors."*<sup>1</sup>

The Mozart development has had a positive visual effect in strengthening the 1993 Specific Plan-proposed "district gateway" effect at the northern end of Mathilda Avenue. However, with introduction of this visually prominent development, there is now an abrupt, visually undesirable change in frontage scale and intensity from the new five- to six-story Mozart development in subdistrict 1 on the northern side of Washington to the existing one- to two-story commercial "pad" frontage in subdistrict 18a on the south side of Washington--i.e., the Chevy's Restaurant/office building, surface parking, and circular Bank of the West building. This visually abrupt change in frontage character will be partially, but not completely, offset by the planned Town Center Mall modifications, which include the proposed construction of new two-story, reduced-setback mall structures immediately north and south of McKinley. When complete, these Town Center Mall modifications will create a more consistent (less interrupted) Mathilda frontage. However,

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<sup>1</sup>City of Sunnyvale, Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Block 1 Office/Retail Project, February 2000; page 19.



the existing two-story Chevy's Restaurant/office building, the adjacent two-story office building to the south, and the circular Bank of the West building on Iowa Avenue, will not be affected by the planned mall modifications program. If implemented, the *Downtown Design Plan* recommendations could have a *beneficial visual effect* on this segment of Mathilda by permitting additional future intensification, including construction of buildings up to 100 feet (six stories high at the "Chevy's" corner property at Mathilda and Washington, strengthening the north-south gateway effect and improving the visual transition here between the new five- to six-story Mozart frontage and the two-story Town Center Mall frontage.

In addition, on the opposite, western side of northern Mathilda (subdistricts 16 and 17), the *Downtown Design Plan* recommends intensification of the existing mix of one- to two-story strip commercial/residential frontages to create a more distinctive and consistent, up to 50-foot (four-story), "High-Density Housing" (27 units/acre maximum) residential frontage along Mathilda, stepping down to lower densities and building heights (two-story maximum) on the Charles Street frontage. Such a redevelopment scenario, if achieved, would have additional *beneficial visual effects* on the northern Mathilda Avenue "district gateway."

- *South End of Mathilda at El Camino Real.* The 1993 Specific-Plan-identified southbound gateway at the southern end of Mathilda in subdistrict 20 currently includes a mix of low-rise, one- and two-story, auto-oriented commercial uses, with some street-front parking. The *Downtown Design Plan* recommends treatment of Mathilda at El Camino Real as a north-south "Downtown Gateway," calling for "enhanced design treatments" at such gateways, "such as special crosswalk pavements and special light poles" (Design Plan page 42). The Design Plan would also permit intensive office development along this Mathilda frontage (subdistrict 20) with a height limit of 100 feet (six stories). These Design Plan provisions, if realized, would create a more visually distinctive and dramatic southern gateway--i.e., would result in a *beneficial visual impact*.

**Mitigation.** No adverse impacts on project area visual gateways have been identified; no mitigation is necessary.

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**Impacts on Project Area View Corridors.** As described in subsection 5.1.3 of this EIR chapter, the 1993 Specific Plan states that the primary view corridors affecting, and currently detracting from, the visual character of Sunnyvale's downtown area are the Mathilda Avenue corridor and El Camino Real corridor. Minor project area view corridors identified in the 1993 Specific Plan include Sunnyvale Avenue, Olive Avenue, Iowa Avenue, and Washington Avenue. The anticipated impacts of the proposed project on visual conditions along these corridors is described below:

(a) General Impacts on Project Area View Corridors. The proposed project would significantly alter the streetscape within the various 1993 Specific Plan-identified view corridors

in the project area. New streetscape elements and/or intensified development envelopes called for in the *Downtown Design Plan*, if implemented, would be visible from each of these streets, as well as from other intersecting streets (e.g., Murphy Avenue, Frances Street, Olive Avenue, McKinley Avenue, Taaffe Street, etc.). For most of these view corridors, the various proposed location-specific "Design Guidelines" and "Streetscape Design Standards" outlined in the proposed Design Plan would mitigate the visual impacts of proposed increases in height and density. In addition, as outlined under "Beneficial Impacts on the General Visual Character of the Project Area" above, the various project components--the associated amendments to the Downtown Specific Plan, General Plan and Zoning Code, and the proposed Downtown Redevelopment Plan amendment facilitated rehabilitation activities--would be expected to improve the overall aesthetic environment in downtown Sunnyvale, including these key view corridors(i.e., Sunnyvale Avenue, Washington Avenue, El Camino Real, Olive Avenue, and Mathilda Avenue). These general improvements to the aesthetic environment along these identified downtown view corridors would represent a *beneficial visual impact* of the project.

(b) Impacts on Mathilda Avenue. The most substantive project-facilitated changes in project area development intensity are proposed along the Mathilda Avenue corridor. Design Plan-recommended addition of ground floor retail, setback reduction, and more organized landscaping, if effectively implemented, would result in a positive change in the visual character of the Mathilda Avenue streetscape, adding needed visual interest at the pedestrian scale. The most visually significant changes proposed in the *Downtown Design Plan* would occur in subdistricts 13, 18a and 20 of the Mathilda Avenue corridor, where substantial building height and density changes are proposed. The Design Plan calls for intensive new office development in these subdistricts, at a maximum building height of 100 feet (six stories). These height increases would be consistent with the recent Mozart development, would not block any existing sensitive view corridors, and would have desired gateway and downtown image improvement effects. These changes would be combined with modifications now being completed to the Town Center Mall, including a new pedestrian connection to the mall from Mathilda Avenue, to improve the streetscape of Mathilda Avenue, with *beneficial visual impacts*.

**Mitigation.** No significant adverse impact on project area view corridors has been identified; no mitigation is necessary.

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**Impacts on District-Specific Visual Characteristics or Features.** The anticipated project-facilitated growth scenario would have the following potential impacts on the visual characteristics and special visual features of each 1993 Specific Plan identified central area "district":

(1) *Town Center Mall District (subdistrict 18).* The Town Center Mall is currently undergoing renovation. The proposed Design Plan does not call for substantial additional changes in the visual characteristics (intensity, building heights, etc.) of this district. To maximize the mall's

potential for regional retail draw, the proposed Design Plan does call for provision of retail sites along Washington Avenue, along a proposed extension of Murphy Avenue and on Mathilda Avenue adjacent to the mall (in the Mathilda Avenue district, subdistrict 18a). In addition to the ongoing mall expansion of regional retail, cinema, and entertainment uses, the proposed Design Plan recommends enhancing the mall's outdoor garden by removing public area roofs, creating more internal connections, creating a pedestrian connection to the proposed Murphy Street extension, and creating a larger, enhanced food court. Such project-facilitated design refinements, if effectively implemented, would serve to better integrate the mall visually with surrounding existing and planned downtown development, representing a *beneficial visual impact*.

(2) *North of Washington District (subdistricts 1 and 1a plus additional areas)*. The proposed Design Plan states that this district provides an important opportunity for mixed-use development in the downtown, including potential live-work uses. New land use and zoning designations are proposed for subdistrict 1a to allow for high-density residential development (69 to 138 d.u./acre). The Design Plan calls for a 100-foot/8-story height limit in subdistrict 1a and a 125-foot/9-story limit in subdistrict 1. As a result, project-facilitated development in this district could ultimately have the highest densities and greatest heights proposed in the project area (except for the 100-foot/6-story office building envelope proposed in subdistrict 13, 18a and 20 along the eastern side of Mathilda Avenue). The changes in development controls proposed in the Design Plan for subdistrict 1a would be generally compatible with the adjacent Mozart development in subdistrict 1 and retail/grocery uses in subdistrict 3 with *less-than-significant* adverse visual impacts. The Design Plan also calls for improved street tree planting along Washington Avenue between Mathilda and Sunnyvale Avenues with an 11-foot to 13-foot wide landscaped median and pedestrian-scale light poles, which if implemented would have *beneficial visual impacts* on this district.

(3) *Murphy Avenue District (subdistrict 2 plus the railroad corridor)*. Design Plan recommendations for this district include maintenance of entertainment uses and modest increases to restaurant, retail, and second floor office uses. The Murphy Avenue Design Guidelines would also remain applicable to this district, which establish maximum building heights of 16 to 25 feet (or up to 36 feet with setback). Existing city regulations also require any building alterations to be in keeping with the historic character of the District. As a result, the proposed project would be expected to have a *less-than-significant* impact on this visually sensitive district. In addition, the Design Plan calls for improved street tree planting along Washington Avenue between Mathilda and Sunnyvale Avenues with an 11-foot to 13-foot wide landscaped median and pedestrian-scale light poles, which if implemented would also have *beneficial visual impacts* on this district.

(4) *Sunnyvale/Carroll District (subdistricts 3, 4 and 5 plus "eastern adjacent sites")*. The proposed Design Plan promotes the transformation of the Sunnyvale/Carroll District from a

predominantly service commercial and low-density residential to a predominantly high-density mixed use residential precinct. Height limits would remain at 50 feet (4 stories).<sup>1</sup> These proposed project provisions, if effectively implemented, would reduce the overall potential development intensity of this district from what is currently permitted under the 1993 Downtown Specific Plan, but would still results in an increase in intensity over the low- and medium-density residential development that exist there now. The visual impact of these changes on existing, visually sensitive, single-family residential frontages on the opposite (south) side of Washington Avenue would be mitigated by the Design Plan-proposed reduction in density on the portion of subdistrict 4 that fronts on Washington, by the Design Plan-proposed reduction in permitted maximum building height limit in subdistricts 4 and 5 from 50 feet (four stories) to 40 feet (three stories), and by the Design Plan proposed improvements to the Washington Avenue streetscape here, including improved street tree planting, an 11- to 13-foot wide landscaped median, and pedestrian scale light poles along the route. As a result, project-facilitated adverse impacts on the visual character of the Sunnyvale/Carroll district would be *less-than-significant*.

(5) *East of Sunnyvale District (subdistricts 6, 7 and 8).* Little regulatory change is proposed within this district. The Design Plan calls for a reduction in the subdistrict 6 building height limitation from 50 feet (four stories) to 40 feet (three stories). The proposed Design Plan provisions would tend to maintain and reinforce the existing multi-family visual character of the district, and would reduce the allowable residential density in portions of subdistrict 6 that front on McKinley and Washington, opposite existing visually sensitive single-family residential development. The Design Plan also calls for reductions in the number of travel lanes along Sunnyvale Avenue between Iowa and Evelyn to permit the addition of a bike lane and permit improved landscaping, plus improved street tree planting, a 12-foot-wide landscaped median, and special pedestrian scale light poles along the route. These project provisions, if effectively implemented, would have *beneficial* impacts on the visual character of the East of Sunnyvale district.

(6) *South of Iowa District (subdistricts 9, 10, 11 and 12, and spillover portions of the Downtown Redevelopment Project Area).* Few regulatory changes are proposed in this district. This area would remain specifically planned for low-medium-density and single-family residential uses in keeping with the character and density of adjacent neighborhoods including the Taaffe/Frances Heritage Housing district. The district is an important visual transition area, bordering the southern edge of the Town Center Mall district and providing a transition in intensity between the intensive, high mass mall complex and the small-scale, single-family Taaffe/Frances Heritage Housing District between Olive and El Camino Real. The proposed project includes no changes in existing Downtown Specific Plan development standards for this South of Iowa district, and would therefore have a *less-than-significant* impact on the visual character of the district.

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<sup>1</sup>The DDP also recommends studying a reduction in height limits in subdistricts 4 and 5 from 50 feet/4 stories to 40 feet/3 stories.

(7) *Mathilda Avenue District (subdistricts 13, 13a, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18a and 20).* The *Downtown Design Plan* identifies and emphasizes the opportunity for creating new, more intensive mixed-use development along this important central area corridor and community gateway. As previously described under the Mathilda "view corridor" discussion, the Design Plan proposes a change in the visual character of the Mathilda Avenue corridor from a low-rise, predominantly commercial corridor with street front parking, to a higher density, greater height, mixed use district with smaller streetfront setbacks. A new land use designation and associated zoning designation are proposed for this district which would allow for high density residential development (36-69 d.u./acre) and multi-story office development. Residential height limits of 50 feet (along Mathilda) and 30 feet (along Charles) are proposed for subdistricts 14-17. Commercial height limits of 100 feet (6 stories) are proposed along Mathilda in subdistricts 13, 18a and 20. If these Design Plan recommendations are realized, the visual character of the recent Mozart development (subdistrict 1) would be extended along much of the east side of Mathilda south of Washington to El Camino Real, producing a positive change in the visual character of the Mathilda Avenue streetscape by adding visual interest and creating a stronger "downtown" image. In addition, on the opposite (western) side of Mathilda, the Design Plan recommends intensification of the existing mix of one- to two-story strip commercial and residential frontages to become a more visually consistent and distinctive, up to 50-foot (four-story) residential frontage along the western side of Mathilda, stepping down to lower densities and building heights (two-story maximum), along Charles Street. Such a buildout scenario, if achieved, would have *beneficial effects* on visual character of this district.

The Design Plan also proposes a number of specific public improvements to improve the street character and pedestrian environment along Mathilda, including travel lane reduction between Washington and Iowa to provide for wider sidewalks and landscaping, plus improved street trees, a 7-foot-wide landscaped median, and special pedestrian scale light poles. Unlike the 1993 Specific Plan, the proposed Design Plan also includes a build-to-the-property line requirement on both sides of Mathilda avenue, which if realized, would serve to create a more well-defined street edge and "boulevard" appearance. These various project provisions, if effectively implemented, would have *beneficial visual impacts* on the Mathilda Avenue district.

In summary, the various anticipated, project-facilitated changes to the visual character of each of the seven central area "districts" would be either *less-than-significant* or *beneficial*.

**Mitigation.** No significant adverse impacts on district-specific visual characteristics or features has been identified; no mitigation is required.

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**Impact 5-2: Light and Glare Impacts.** The project would be expected to facilitate (permit) construction of five-to-six-story (100- foot) maximum height structures along the east side of Mathilda Avenue and within the North of Washington District. Such buildings could include nighttime exterior illumination features. These exterior lighting features would be introduced in a downtown area that is already highly urbanized with an abundance of existing lights. Future proposed individual developments within the project area would also be required to comply with existing lighting controls set forth in the Sunnyvale Municipal Code section 19.42.050, which states that "*Lights, spotlights, floodlights, reflectors, and other means of illumination shall be shielded or equipped with special lenses in such a manner as to prevent any glare or direct illumination on any public street or other property.*" Nevertheless, exterior lighting features above the 50-foot elevation on the permitted five-to-six story buildings along Mathilda, including exterior building illumination and illuminated signage, could be prominently visible at night and represent a noticeable visual distraction in views from surrounding driving routes and from residential areas to the west of the project area (west of Charles Street). Such effects could represent a **significant adverse visual impact** (see criteria a, c, and d in subsection 5.3.1, "Significance Criteria").

**Mitigation 5-2:** In addition to required compliance with lighting controls set forth in Sunnyvale Municipal Code section 19.42.050, include in the conditions of approval for any individual downtown construction project involving building heights of greater than 50 feet, a prohibition on exterior illumination of any building element above 50 feet after 10:00 PM, every day, or establish this requirement by ordinance for the entire project area. Implementation and enforcement of this measure would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant level**.